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Beauty and the Beast* as a myth and metaphor in the contemporary world. Looking forward with Apuleius' fable of *Cupid and Psyche

1 Introduction

Cupid and Psyche is a fable full of conundrums and, over the years, I have written about a number of paradoxes and tensions that emanate from the god of love appearing in his own myth.¹ The naming of the supernaturally beautiful but mortal princess as Psyche (Soul) reinforces the metamorphic nature of the narrative, as conceptual phenomena become characters with back stories and bodily extension. In this story, at the heart of Apuleius' novel, Cupid takes time out from propelling the action in stories about other gods and helpless mortals in the throes of passion with tragic and comic consequences. He becomes a willing victim of his own force and appears to settle down at the end of the story. Or we could say that Cupid's self-harming (he confesses to shooting himself with an arrow in order to fall in love with Psyche at *Met.* 5.24) gives him autonomy.

In *Cupid and Psyche*, Apuleius proves himself a worthy heir of Ovid in putting his indelible mark upon what could be characterised as a mythologized version of artistic representations of Love and Soul. He also gives philosophy its own fable, making a new story out of sacrifice rituals, and incorporating a few narrative elements familiar to us from subsequent folktales, for instance taboos and also testing tasks for the heroine. The fairy-story genre as popularized in and beyond Europe in later centuries includes scenes and narrative arcs from *Cupid and Psyche*. The sojourn of Psyche in the palace of a non-human and her relationship with an unusual suitor captured the imagination of post-classical writers and artists.

Cupid and Psyche, transformed into the Beast and Beauty, are a host and guest with, it seems, endless possibilities for visualisation, but also life lessons. Movie-makers have recognised the pulling power of physical and psychological mismatches in love and its potential for intensifying romance and eroticism. Star-crossed lovers are perennially popular, but the bestial meeting the beautiful

1 James 1987, 140–79; 1998, 42–6.

possesses a particular piquancy for cinema audiences. The unity of the supernatural (vampiric) male and the ‘special’ female proved a winning formula in the four *Twilight* movies (from the books by Stephenie Meyer) which attracted mass teenage audiences with its interminable relationship between insipid Edward and the significantly named Bella.

2 From the complex to the simple?

Apuleius’ novel has inspired allegorical, sententious and satirical treatments and critiques with *Cupid and Psyche* recognised as the structural and thematic fulcrum of the mainframe ass story.² It might seem counter intuitive to reduce the reception of *Cupid and Psyche* to a simple fairy story, but its afterlife as *Beauty and the Beast* benefits from the ‘adaptation studies’ approach so that we search for what is added to the source text rather than what has been lost from it.³

It would appear that Apuleius’ fable introduced motifs that resonate with contemporary concerns and popular perceptions about love, identity, porous bodies, and strange couplings. It can even provide a commentary on modern life and virtual reality, although this approach may require a stretch of credulity comparable to the donkey-hero Lucius’ willingness to suspend disbelief:

‘Ego vero’ inquam ‘nihil impossibile arbitror, sed utcumque fata decreverint, ita cuncta mortalibus provenire.’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I consider nothing to be impossible. However the fates decide, that is the way everything turns out for mortal men.’ (Apuleius, *Met.* 1.20)⁴

Cupid and Psyche as *bella fabella* is not submerged by this woody way of reception; on the contrary, there are additional layers of narrative sophistication and visual aesthetics to behold in the adaptations of *Beauty and the Beast* that can reconnect it to the rich literary texture of Apuleius, while simultaneously remind readers of the Latin novel that the fable of Love and the Soul is always an old wives’ creation.

² On Apuleius’ source see the introduction and Tilg 2014, *passim* who revisits the relationship between the Greek fantasy, *Metamorphoses* and *The Golden Ass*. However, no-one has been bold enough to suggest that the fable of *Cupid and Psyche* was one of the inserted stories in the Greek original.

³ Bakogianni 2017, 470.

⁴ All translations are taken from the 1989 Loeb edition by J. Arthur Hanson.

Taking refuge in generalities, we could say that within the old woman's fantasy lurk age-old preoccupations about relationships between human, animal, the divine and the hidden nature of such dangerous liaisons. The theme of miscegenation in Apuleius' fable adds spice to the scenario of star-crossed lovers that dominates the Greek romances. *Beauty and the Beast* stories have taken up the restoration and redemption of the male but it is Psyche who needs transformation and elevation in the Latin novel, while the donkey-hero Lucius plays the part of the beast in the mainframe narrative.

In both cases the 'happy-ever-after' of Psyche and Lucius can be deconstructed as an ending that operates on a satirical rather than a spiritual plane.

3 Monsters, maidens and mutual manipulation

The miscegenation or strange coupling theme is not confined to the central diversion of the *Cupid and Psyche* narrative in Apuleius' prose narrative. The relay of the fable to the reader, namely Lucius, is himself a beast by this point in the story. After his unfortunate transformation his human identity remains inside the skin of a donkey. Our hero is not the intended audience of the *Cupid and Psyche* story but, as an enslaved donkey, he overhears the *bella fabella* (aptly named by the ass as a 'beautiful little story' at 6.25) told by the drunken housekeeper in the brigands' hideout in the mountains. As an animal Lucius enjoys a close encounter with Charite, the lovely captive in the cave to whom the story is told, and whom he helps to make an escape bid. Later in his adventures (*Met.* 10.20–22) he is seduced by a good-looking, high-born woman eager to pay for sex with the well-endowed ass.

Lucius' erotic encounters in his donkey form have a distinct *Beauty and the Beast* timbre. The way in which the maiden (or in this case, *matrona*) manipulates and transforms the 'monster' by appealing to his human empathy, passion and fallibility has proved an enduring *topos* for creative artists and writers.⁵ Movie treatments of mismatched couples that give a beautiful female a restorative and redemptive role in her relationship with a supernaturally strong and

⁵ Lucius in bestial form becomes a lover of a beautiful woman. This found a place in the union of the hairy and the fairy (Bottom the Weaver, turned into an ass, and Titania, queen of the fairies) in the Shakespearean canon, and is seated at the numinous centre of a play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is full of resonances from Ovid as well as Apuleius. The bard certainly borrowed not just myths and mythical vignettes from these ancient authors, but recognised that both presented the reader with a canvas of connected themes and motifs. See Carver 2007, on the Renaissance reception.

dangerous male can also highlight this aspect of Psyche's influence over Cupid. Fairy and fantasy stories end with the beast restrained of his own free will. Screen versions relish the revelation that the monster is a man of beauty; once released from the spell the heroine of the movies is as entranced as Psyche when she sees the love god in his supernatural splendour.

In Apuleius, the fable suggests that the love god is tied down in the arms of his wife, Psyche, and so reformed. Taming and civilizing the beast has become an important part of the narrative's *Nachleben*. This strand, the manipulation of the magical partner, as well as the matter of ill-matched couples, and this might mean in status, appearance or personality, is present throughout Apuleius' prose fiction on a figurative as well as an actual plane.⁶ In the fable, Cupid agrees to a disastrous course of action, namely opening up his house to Psyche's mischief-making sisters who are cunning, insanely jealous, and without any redeeming features. Their story of the snake spouse seems to confirm the text of the oracle at 4.33, which predicted her sacrifice to something monstrous.

On taking a lamp and a razor to their bed, Psyche discovers that her mysterious husband is Cupid, a winged god with a supernaturally alluring appearance. Seeing the beast as he really is and recognising her love for him is a persistent resolution to the narrative arc of *Beauty and the Beast* in its fairy-story form. The depiction of the beast as a monster to be slaughtered was graphically resurrected by Disney in the 1991 movie. The reluctance of the heroine's husband or host to pander to her feelings for family is another correspondence between the classical text and later versions, as Beauty's temporary departure risks abandoning the spellbound suitor to grief and death. Apuleius' imaginative play upon the relationship between human and less than or more than human creatures has proved an inspiration for the popular romance, but, like so many fairy stories, it has darker elements which take the audience out of its comfort zone.

In mass consumption, Cupid and Psyche may have morphed into the Beast and Beauty, raising the motif of miscegenation between maiden and monster, but this allows us to revisit the original from the perspective of romance and horror that continues to enthrall readers and audiences alike.⁷ The civilising power of female love possesses a persistent cachet. In 2016, Joss Whedon, director of the *Avengers* franchise, (after a notable career as creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and other critically acclaimed television series) highlighted the taming

⁶ I remain indebted to a conference presentation by Lisa Hughes at the Classical Association 2008. For a full acknowledgement see James 2014, 325–7.

⁷ James 2014 covers some of the horror story features of the fable foregrounded in its later incarnations (322–5) and engages with Accardo's chapter 'The Beast goes to the Movies.' (Accardo 2002, 88–101).

of the Hulk (Bruce Banner) by super strong Natasha Romanova (Black Widow, who in the Marvel comics tradition is fighting against a long training to be ruthless and inhuman).⁸ In a slightly disturbing, if stimulating, keynote presentation at the June 2016 Euroslayage conference (the annual celebration of the works of Joss Whedon) held in Kingston University, Surrey, Lewis Call argued that empowered women (always beautiful or 'hot' in the words of Whedon) give certain men a safe space in which to be subdued and submissive. The monstrous men in question willingly partake in infantilization (succumbing to stroking and lullabies, amongst other therapeutic techniques).

Female domination is, in this context, loving, healthy, and effective for calming ultra-masculine men who are conflicted by their exceptional physical powers. In such fantasy scenarios where the woman takes the risk of confronting the beast, she can, in turn, be cared for, comforted and saved by her uncanny lover (the humanized hero) once she has established her strength and authority over him. Elements of this relationship might sound familiar to readers of Apuleius, and it puts an additional spin upon Psyche's ambiguous feelings for her spouse: *in eodem corpore odit bestiam, diligit maritum*. 'in the same body she loathed the beast but loved her husband.' (*Met*.5.21).

A suitably lyrical and aesthetic approach to what could be seen as a myth of miscegenation was presented at the University of Washington in May, 2016. In the fascinating exhibition, *Just One Look*, at the Seattle Conference, *Feminism and Classical Myth*, in which artists visualised the form, content and meaning of myths, Mari Eckstein Gower's Psyche becomes the butterfly, the winged woman, and has to undergo phases of transformation before she is made immortal. Gower states (p.27) that 'this is not the hero's saga; this is the maiden's tale.' Psyche does not believe that as a young girl she deserves a better fate than mating with a monster. And she says 'who was I a new wife to look upon the true face of my husband?' (*ibid.*) The work is suffused with symbolic all-seeing eyes (a concept we find in Cocteau's film, *La Belle et La Bête*, discussed below) which suggest that the gaze changes the narrative and that the gods watch over the world. According to the summary accompanying the Gower panels (figure 28), this all takes place because a flustered Cupid accidentally wounds himself with his own arrow, so the 'willing victim' motif is noted by Gower (p.26).

⁸ Joss Whedon and team aired various narrative arcs on the theme of miscegenated couples in his now canonical TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The central relationship between slayer and reformed vampire occupied the first three seasons. The tormented Angel, her vampire lover, returns from a Hell dimension (where the slayer was forced to send him) as a wild and snarling creature, and he urgently needs to be de-traumatised by Buffy's tender loving care.



Figure 28: Mari Eckstein Gower: 'Cupid and Psyche', exhibition: 'Just One Look'. Reprinted with permission of the artist and the University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

If we apply what is suspect psychology with a dose of wishful thinking, even in the modern discourse of female empowerment and gender reversals, to Apuleius' fable, it could be said that Cupid has deliberately made himself vulnerable and human in the relationship with Psyche, firstly by self harming:

'Sed hoc feci leviter, scio, et praeclarus sagittarius ipse me telo meo percussi teque coniugem meam feci.'

'But that [i.e. flying to Psyche as her lover] was a frivolous thing to do, I know. Illustrious archer that I am, I shot myself with my own arrow and made you my wife.' (Apuleius, *Met.*5.24).

Cupid subsequently allows himself to be persuaded by Psyche's gentle and erotic endearments against his better judgement, to become the true mistress of his palace and invite her own guests in, this in spite of Psyche being the lesser being in the marriage. Apuleius is clearly drawing upon the language of female domination and male (faux) submission that Ovid perfected in his love poetry (Hindermann 2009, *passim*⁹).

Though her beauty is divine, Psyche is still the mortal consort of a cosmically powerful husband. The tipsy old woman who narrates the beguiling story (*lepida fabula*) is herself an unusual hostess who is actually casting distracting shadows on the cave about the nature of Love for a captive guest, Charite, the girl fated to be destroyed by Passion or *Amor* unconfined: the all-consuming desire that unsuccessful suitor Thrasyllus conceives for the lovely Charite destroys her husband and her happiness, a particularly poignant turn of events as this occurs

⁹ There are close verbal similarities between the persuasive techniques and flattering terms employed by the noblewoman in her seduction of the donkey and Psyche's blandishments to Cupid: *Met.* 10.22 and 5.6.

after her rescue from the robbers' cave and joyful nuptials to her suitor and saviour, Tlepolemus. The love god's flames of passion have turned Thrasyllus into a ruthless killer, so Cupid has clearly reverted to being the wayward boy after the fantasy finishes and Charite's interrupted tragedy continues. The *Cupid and Psyche* fable was always an elaborate fiction about a supernatural male being subdued by an exceptional girl, just as the *Avengers'* lovers play out a utopian scenario of dominance and submission.

4 The French connection

Jean Cocteau's ravishing cinematic production *La Belle et La Bête* was 70 years old in 2016 (the year of the *Cupid and Psyche* reception conference.) Disney's Oscar-nominated *Beauty and the Beast* was celebrating its 25th anniversary, and both this cartoon movie and the non-animated remake of 2017 take a modicum of inspiration from the influential 1946 art house film of the same name. Helen Elsom (1983, 149–150) was the first classical scholar to engage with the Cocteau movie as an Apuleian reception piece. This Latin legacy was most certainly unwitting on the part of the French director who, according to Elsom, believed *Beauty and the Beast* to be an English fable and cited as his text the version of the fairy story by Mme Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780) who had spent time in England. Hers is a linear and less complicated narrative compared with Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* of 1740.

I am grateful to Stephen Harrison for pointing out that Cocteau was very likely to have encountered La Fontaine's work during his studies at the prestigious Parisian Lycée Condorcet, but the director nowhere acknowledges any such influence. Harrison 2016 demonstrates that La Fontaine's *Les Amours de Psyché et de Cupidon* of 1669 'marked the connection between the reception of *Cupid and Psyche* and the history of the modern European fairy fable.'¹⁰ There are perhaps elements in the cinematographic choices Cocteau made that evoke Cupid's palace as imagined by La Fontaine. On the other hand, Cocteau was independently committed to 'make wonderful things happen and film them',¹¹ which is an unintentional echo of Apuleius' promise in the prologue:

¹⁰ See Accardo (2002, 68–87) for summaries of the stories by Comtesse d'Aulnoy, Barbot de Villeneuve and Leprince de Beaumont, which he critiques from the perspective of inner psychic processes, the fear and ignorance of the virgin, and the humanization and socialization of the id by the superego.

¹¹ Elsom 1983, 149.

figuras fortunasque hominum in alias imagines conversas et in se rursum mutuo nexu reffectas ut mireris.

so that you may be amazed at men's forms and fortunes transformed into other shapes and then restored again in an interwoven knot.

(Met.1.1).

The movie, too, begins with a plea to its viewers to become artless and childlike. The young would see that the plucked rose signified tragedy and that a monster might feel shame in front of the maiden. Of course, Cupid hides his identity from Psyche, but for different motives. He is a sight to behold, but dangerously beautiful in the Apuleius fable. In *Cupid and Psyche* the bestial creature (a voracious serpent) masquerading as Psyche's husband is the invention of the spiteful sisters who also have an afterlife in *Beauty and the Beast*. Cocteau conflates them with Cinderella's vain and envious step-siblings, and reduces the number of her siblings from five to three, departing from his source, de Beaumont. He includes an equally feckless brother playing his part in Belle's bad decisions. It is this brother, Ludovic, and her suitor, Avenant, who, with the encouragement of the sisters, ride off to steal the beast's treasure.¹²

One of the most interesting correspondences between the Cocteau film and the fable is the depiction of Belle's *carcer beatus* or luxurious imprisonment. On her arrival at the palace she is struck with wonder, just as Psyche stands amazed at the wealth and workmanship of her new home.¹³ Hospitality invariably brushes up against horror and the macabre, as the palace, like the beast, is under a magic spell. Lighting and music make the ambience of the palace disturbing. Bodiless hands and arms serve Belle and illuminate her way. Beauty, unlike Psyche, is not sexually possessed by her captor but she is imprisoned in a castle full of eyes, and we, as viewers or voyeurs, participate in the surveillance, while simultaneously identifying with the victim (figure 29).

In Apuleius, Psyche is not a willing guest but a sacrificial victim just as Beauty takes the place (rather Alcestis-like) of her father in what is a sumptuous monster's den. Psyche is wafted down to a palatial residence in a kind of *katabasis*,

¹² For the coincidental correspondence between Lucius' steed, Candidus, and the luminous white horse, Magnifique, see James 1998, 46, n.18. Cocteau went to great pains to choreograph Aramis, the circus pony cast in the role.

¹³ I am indebted to Janice Siegel who commented at my presentation (Leeds Reception Conference) upon the possible presence of Zephyr, the West Wind, in the arrival scenes. The drapery of the Beast's palace billows gently around Belle who glides along the floor in an ethereal slow motion, as if she is being magically transported. Cocteau greatly admired Josette Day's (Belle) grace and naturalness in speech and demeanour. See his journal, 1947/1972, 18, 62.



Figure 29: Still from Jean Cocteau, *La Belle et La Bête*, 1946. ‘Belle and the beast dine’. Taken from the BFI DVD of ‘La Belle et La Bête’ in accordance with laws governing fair use.

but in fact she is entering an earthly paradise (or having a taste of the Olympus which will become her eternal home by the end of the story). Purveyors of the fable as fairy story on screen love to linger, as does the narrator in Apuleius, over Psyche’s entrance and her exploration of the magnificent and magical interior of her new home. The princess is fearful and overawed by the luxury and also the magical properties of the palace. The reader or viewer is made aware of the material riches of the rooms (apparently unguarded, as the robber housekeeper exclaims, providing the narrative focalization that is the equivalent of the point-of-view shot) while an entranced Psyche is waited on and watched over by unseen servants.¹⁴ The divine residence is modelled upon a Roman villa (Brodersen 1998, 113–125), and Psyche’s reactions also remind the reader of Lucius’ wonderment at the lavish house of his aunt in Hypata (*Met.* 2.4 and 19).

Hospitality and the unusual behaviour of hosts and guests is part of the fabric of Apuleius’ narrative, and Cocteau was not the only movie director to exploit its possibilities in the *Cupid and Psyche* storyline of his cinematic work.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ Zimmerman and van Mal Maeder (1998, 94–95) pinpoint this moment as a shift to Psyche’s perspective upon events. They argue persuasively for a ‘symphony of voices and subjective perceptions’ throughout the fable.

¹⁵ I shall argue that the much later Disney cartoon of *Beauty and the Beast* engages with the French film in spite of being a very different cinematic genre aimed at a mass audience. This

movie does incorporate a half-hearted taboo in that the Beast warns Belle not to look into his eyes and, like Cupid, he confines his visits to the evenings and the dimness of the lamps. In response to his self-knowing remarks about being a monster but having a gentle heart, Belle says that many men hide their monstrosity beneath pleasing exteriors. The beast is made up to be frightening, and he behaves at times like a wild animal, in hunting and slaughtering his prey, or slaking his thirst in a stagnant pond. The brutish side of him as beast limits his intellectual vigour, something that de Villeneuve and Leprince de Beaumont emphasize in their versions. However, in both Cocteau and later in Disney it is the village suitor who is heartless and destined to die.

When Belle's beau, Avenant, is killed (trying to burgle the beast's temple of treasure, he is shot by an arrow from the vivified statue of Diana), the dying beast revives in the warmth of Belle's declaration of love. As she embraces him, the heroine utters the line: 'I am the monster!' The feckless human hero becomes the beast (suggesting he was brutish at his core), but the beast turns into Ardent, identical to the heroine's would-be lover, Avenant (both are played by Jean Marais). He is suitably handsome (figure 30).



Figure 30: Still from Jean Cocteau, *La Belle et la Bête*, 1946. 'Belle and Ardent'. Taken from the BFI DVD of 'La Belle et la Bête' in accordance with laws governing fair use.

is partly because the uncanny nature of the household servants intrigues those in the business of visualisation and the moving image.

This is a quirky and bizarre resolution with Belle confessing she did love Avenant, and saying, coquettishly,¹⁶ to her new-found prince that she likes being frightened with him. He carries her through the clouds to his kingdom and this reprises both the transporting of Psyche to Cupid's palace by Zephyr and her translation to Olympus by the god, to meet the family, as it were. Cocteau hints that Belle is just a little disappointed to lose the distinctive looking beast, an unconscious and very distant echo of the scorn heaped upon handsome Loukios in the Greek *Onos* finale (see the introduction for the relationship between the *Onos* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*): in the ancient epitome, the hero returns to the woman who loved him in his ass skin, but she points out that his sexual prowess has been much reduced from the abilities of the noble and well-hung donkey. Modern miscegenation myths from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to the *Twilight* franchise and Marvel Comics' *Avengers* movies echo the desire of the heroine to 'have a little monster in her man', a pithy observation from the vampire Spike, in regard to super-slayer Buffy's preference when it comes to sexual satisfaction.

It is a challenge to add to Elsom's skilful and succinct summary of the movie's place in Apuleian reception and the way in which it was also telling the story of Lucius, as a man turned into a beast by a bad fairy but restored to humanity by the love of a female. In 1998 I made some new observations upon the happy coincidences in the imagery and narrative arc between not just the *Cupid and Psyche* fable and *La Belle et La Bête*, but also motifs from Lucius' adventures that featured in the film. Elsom notes implicit metamorphoses throughout the screen fairy fable and the feminist slant that Cocteau intended to give the story. She also acknowledges that it is a 'baroque but finely wrought artefact full of charm,' that allows us, the viewers, to steep ourselves in a fantasy that also enjoys uniting the ethereal with the mundane. Cocteau is a true heir to Apuleius in that respect.¹⁷

¹⁶ See Elsom 1988, 150.

¹⁷ Sadly, there is not space to discuss Cocteau's fascinating *Belle et La Bête: Journal d'un Film* (1947) translated by Ronald Duncan in 1972. Amongst many nuggets in the diary are Cocteau's approach to the poetic and fantastic via the realistic, the precise and deliberately documentary style, his admiration for the Daedalian skills of his film set workers and lighting crew (creating the miraculous images of the palace and its treasures), and his pleasure in actor Jean Marais' portrayal of the beast. Cocteau describes how Marais met the director's intentions: 'he made of him a monster, which, instead of being awful, remains seductive, with that kind of monster's seductiveness in which one feels at once the man and the beast.'

5 Disneyfication and looking for Sourcery!

The 1991 Disney production of *Beauty and the Beast* was conceived in the style of a Broadway musical, and yet it is partly a pastiche and homage to Cocteau. Gaston, the muscle-bound suitor in the village is the real monster, ‘primeval’ as a modern bookworm Belle dubs him. He is ‘a catch’, a muscle man, but has none of the charm of Avenant in the 1946 film, although they are united by an irritating narcissism. However, Gaston does also die, falling from the precipice at the top of the castle, which is the fate engineered by Psyche for her evil sisters who attempted to destroy her happiness. Belle discovers the dying beast and, full of remorse, declares her love. This animated beauty is only indirectly responsible for the wounding of her unknown lover (Figure 31). Psyche bent over Cupid and accidentally spilled hot oil on the god, but Belle strikes a similar pose to resuscitate her beast.



Figure 31: Still from Disney 1991 *Beauty and the Beast*. Source: <https://animationscreencaps.com/beauty-and-the-beast-1991/52/#box-1/180/beauty-and-the-beast-disneyscreencaps.com-9360.jpg?strip=all> Released through Animationscreencaps [accessed 12th June 2019]

The movie gives a knowing wink to fairy fable genres and the history of animation, so it is consciously self-referential.¹⁸ Belle loves to read romantic fairy

18 Linda Wolverton, screenwriter, mentions seeing the Cocteau movie in college, but admits that Disney’s animate objects (talking candlesticks and clocks) were principally introduced to be vehi-

stories (more meta-fiction) and is delighted when the beast bestows his library upon her. The Disney Belle is more resourceful and proactive than Cocteau's heroine. A modern miss, she helps the beast to remember his reading skills and, they start, appropriately, by revisiting Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* who know they will be regarded by their warring families to be a disastrous mismatch. The movie demonstrates that the intellectual nurturing of the beast is, as ever, therapeutic and life changing.

Like Cocteau, Disney exploits the sinister and scary aspects of the beast's sumptuous abode. When the eccentric inventor father loses his way, he finds himself on a dark path to what could be Dracula's castle from a Hammer Horror movie. Towards the end of the fantasy, Beauty's would-be suitor in the village rounds up a posse of angry villagers to kill the beast, a notable example of the 'harrying of the monster' motif which is reminiscent of the cinematic *Frankenstein* of 1931, directed by James Whale. There are other odd Apuleian resonances, for instance the single wilting red rose that marks time running out for the enchanted prince to regain his human form. Lucius was transformed into an ass by accident and yet it is a consequence of his curiosity. Eating roses will restore him to his human form. All these correspondences have to come with the *caveat* that they could simply be cultural mnemonics and shared symbols uniting texts separated by centuries.

The prince has been punished for being inhospitable towards a superhuman creature, failing the divine encounter test, but, like Apuleius' hero, he has fallen foul of a witch. Belle's curiosity, when banned by the beast from the West Wing where the rose is encased under glass, is possibly an import from *Bluebeard* rather than an echo of *Psyche*'s breaking of the taboo imposed by Cupid.¹⁹ The palace boasts impressive Baroque architecture (Belle is given a tour in state-ly home style, a scene omitted from the 2017 Disney version), and the whole human household have been transformed into objects of utility and luxury.

They are comical and friendly, welcoming and hopeful that Belle will break the spell. There is an erotically disposed candlestick which, unlike the oil lamp in *Cupid and Psyche*, does not injure the beast but remains undyingly loyal to his master. The clock is another head servant, and veteran actor Angela Lansbury voices the singing teapot as the metamorphosed housekeeper, a role reprised

cles for singing Howard Ashman's songs. Wolverton (*The Guardian* 14/03/17, 'Reviews' p.20) set out to create a heroine who was about more than her looks, not passive but in keeping with the times (the 1990s.) She also remembers that the final scenes were rushed and some of the later animation was 'not great', with frames borrowed from an earlier cartoon, *Sleeping Beauty*.

¹⁹ See the introduction 6 on links between *Bluebeard* and *Cupid and Psyche* in Perrault's fairy tales.

by Emma Thompson in the recent Disney production. The metamorphosed servants look on with pleasure and approval when Belle and the Beast are finally united.

6 Beauty and the Beast regenerated for the 21st century

The most recent of cinematic incarnations of *Beauty and the Beast* saw its general UK distribution on March 17th 2017. The history of her ‘favourite fairytale’ was explored in *The Guardian* (Sunday March 12th 2017, 19) by author Amanda Craig who brought the fable of *Cupid and Psyche* in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass* (*Metamorphoses*) to the attention of the reader. As well as identifying the Latin fable as the source text for this enduring theme in global culture, which was refreshing for classical scholars, Craig selected a few key novels spanning the 18th to the 21st century, which, in her opinion, have creatively reworked the premise of maiden and monster, citing Marina Warner’s study (1995) of the miscegenation motif and its various subtexts. Craig rates the Disney animated musical version the best version yet and she was eagerly anticipating the ‘live’ remake. Her willingness to be entranced by the 2017 big budget movie was based upon her approval of Disney’s 1991 empowerment of the heroine Belle, and the Beast’s back story with its redemption of a selfish prince who needs to learn about love and self-sacrifice.²⁰

As in the original movie, all the staff are moving and speaking household objects, but the added piquancy is the emergence of real-life actors at the finale rather than animated drawings, as they are all re-transformed. In fact, the transition of the flat surface and drawn figures to flesh and blood characters on screen that the Disney industry has fashioned could be a metaphor for the move from representation to real in the history of the fable, with the proviso

²⁰ Craig suggests that ‘the marriage of true minds’ (Warner’s phrase) is a determining factor in the plotlines of Richardson’s *Pamela* and Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. See Warner 1994, 273–97. She also mentions Trollope’s *Ayala’s Angel* and one of Angela Carter’s subversive ‘takes’ on the fable, *The Tiger’s Bride*, though I would say that *The Courtship of Mr Lion* is just as iconoclastic with its Belle becoming a narcissist before reforming and returning to the beast. Accardo (2002, 86–7) argues for the strong subtext of *Cupid and Psyche*, lightly filtered through *Beauty and the Beast*, in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and du Maurier’s *Rebecca*. A legion of correspondences between the fable and Hitchcock’s screen adaptation of du Maurier’s novel are creatively and intriguingly identified and explored by Padilla 2016, 151–209.

that the cinematic experience is still an illusion of corporeality.²¹ The number 'Human Again' as sung by the enchanted servants at an earlier point in the film was edited out of the 1991 version and was not reinstated for the remake. However, the 2017 movie did not demur from the height of kitsch and, as crockery and furniture, they sing with gusto *Be Our Guest*, before an amused and bemused Belle, played by an elfin Emma Watson. I am indebted to Regine May for her observation that the 2017 heroine somewhat mischievously suggests that the prince might grow a beard when she sees that he is a handsome human. See also the ambivalence expressed in Charlotte Yonge's version, whose Aurelia-Psyche must chose between a young but vague and an older but grizzled suitor, discussed by Schultze in this volume. It seems that a succession of 'Belles' might miss the beast and yearn to retrieve their 'bit of rough'!

Whereas in Cocteau the music score is part of the ambience of the palace, Disney is truer to Apuleius in demonstrating that the captive girl is right royally entertained by the Beast's servants. At *Met.* 5.3, Psyche is entranced by an invisible lyre and a melodious choir. Disney's central production number *Be Our Guest* is discussed in Scott (2015), who notes that the song in the popular and Oscar-nominated original of 1991 demonstrates the ecstasy of consumerism in a world where the servants in the form of furniture and kitchen utensils revel in service with their quasi-erotic desire to be used: 'they act as avatars communing with the guest.'²² His critique appears in a chapter entitled 'Anatomically Correct.' For Scott (and he may be marginalising the irony and the incongruity of this set piece), both the *Beauty and the Beast* story and its Disney vision and visualisation encapsulate what is on offer when strangers take up residence in holiday rentals. He sees the beast as a metaphor for generous hospitality; nevertheless, rules of reciprocity must be obeyed.

Scott targets the corporate firm Airbnb as the providers of the modern-day magical experience which operates on a superficial trust economy, and he believes that the company is consciously buying into *Beauty and the Beast* (Airbnb indeed!) as everyone's favourite fairy story. The internet corporation offers an opportunity for holiday-makers and home owners to save money or profit from the renting exchange.

²¹ It is interesting that aficionados of quality cinema and cinematography judge the 2D version as superior to the 3D screening. 3D effects can impress with artefacts leaping out into the audience, but this only draws attention to the artificiality of our experience. A movie that by depth of composition and power of performances in a strong narrative absorbs its audience into the screen is invariably a far better triumph of illusion.

²² Scott 2015, 34.

Airbnb claims that living in the homes of others is fantasy become reality, that ‘every day, hosts around the world create magical experiences for thousands of guests’ (quoted in Scott 2015, 34), but there is a downside to featuring the monstrous host and the imprisoned guest of the fable as symbolic figures and subtexts in their advertising. The beast of the fable has hidden powers (a magic mirror and other sorceries) which just might reveal that Airbnb’s service to their hosts (via their tracking screen) is predicated upon their ability to follow the movements of the guests inside and outside their temporary abodes.²³ In the surveillance society, such transactions come with an insistence that all users (Scott 2015: 28) ‘accumulate an online history of consistent, amiable personhood, so that we can be recognised wherever we crop up in digital space.’

The company offers an uncanny homeliness for its customers, a contradiction recognised by initial online discussions about the service as far back as 2011, which yielded evidence that a mutual paranoia about predator and prey was developing alongside an uneasiness about occupying an unknown house. On the 14th of April 2017 there were various news reports of Airbnb needing to introduce additional security checks on accounts and bookings, as bogus identities had been created and houses to let had been burgled. The American user was required in 2014 to have their government ID scanned into their profiles, but the company is still being duped by dummies (Scott 2015, 36). The cunning and skilful surfers of the net are fully capable of god-like elaborate fictions which hide their true selves. Thus the corporate dream has descended into the personal nightmare. It is worth recalling that Cupid, once he is master of his own abode, is protective of his privacy and wary of guests. However, he has been introduced in the fable as the ‘thief of love’ who runs through other folks’ houses armed with flames and arrows, so he suffers like his victims, and not just in terms of the pains and pangs of passion (*Met.* 4.30).

Cupid, the eternal and ubiquitous force of passion, takes refuge in his own tailor-made fable and craves being in a fixed place, his domain, whatever the consequences for the world. Thus the god morphs from being Love to being a lover. Herein lies the tension of wanting to be connected and also private and remote. The flighty god settles down, but he can only do so ‘off the radar’, and he takes pains not to be discovered. He does not succeed, being forced by Psyche’s betrayal to fly wounded back to his mother. In the meantime, the

23 The beast, after his outrage at the merchant’s theft, namely plucking a single rose for his daughter, then offers him an exchange, his life for that of a replacement companion. The merchant departs and agrees to supply a substitute guest, just as, later in the narrative, Beauty promises to return, and just as Psyche vows that her sisters will not cause trouble as guests in the palace of Cupid.

gavia, the interfering and chattering sea-bird, lets Venus know what has been happening in her absence. A mythical prototype of Twitter ensures that there is nothing sacred or secret about the divine family's conduct and its consequences.

7 That's all folks. A conclusion

This essay has tentatively explored the potential of the central fable to become a metaphor for modern anxieties and desires, as Apuleius has invested it with a subtext or implied commentary on the representational becoming the real, of mortal aspirations to the divine, and of the descent (by design or accident) into the bestial. After all, the story sits within a prose romance originally (probably!) entitled *Metamorphoses*, and the prologue promises the reader wonderment at the transformations and re-transformations to come. In *Cupid and Psyche* the challenge of fluid identities, be they corporeal, elemental (or, transposed to the modern world, digital) possesses a particular piquancy. The blurring of boundaries between human and animal, puny mortals and powerful deities, the mundane and the supernatural, heightens the charm and the comedy of the old wives' fable.

In its guise as a fairy story, *Beauty and the Beast*, the fable can bring unexpected and new subtleties to the surface. Whether it can provide a philosophical template for the 21st century is open to question, but it might allow us to debate the complexity of Apuleius' invention in the language of new technology or virtual reality. In a world where we are not sure whether we are striving to get a happy ending, or to be godlike at the cost of acquiring thick digital skins, we need to discern the difference between dreams and reality. As Charite found to her cost, the pleasure produced by the fable of Cupid and Psyche (*Voluptas* is their child) is not immortal but fantastic and fleeting.

8 Bibliography

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